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Culver's good advice

Iowa's Senator John Culver is entitled to an "I told you so" in the wake of George Bush's announcement that he does not intend to try to stay on as director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Culver was one of four members of the Senate Armed Services Committee to vote against Bush's confirmation last January. The Iowa Democrat said he opposed Bush because of his short likely tenure. Culver declared that the CIA needed someone "the next administration would consider as its choice for director — someone qualified, independent and nonpartisan enough to be able to provide more than transitional service."

Bush had no prior experience in intelligence work when he was named by President Ford to head the CIA. Jimmy Carter probably would not have retained the former Republican national chairman even if Bush had expressed interest in staying on.

The replacement of Bush will give the CIA its fifth director in four years. The Senate could have held down the turnover by taking Culver's advice and insisting on a nominee with a good chance of being retained.

President-elect Carter would be wise to lean heavily on the counsel

of his vice-president in selecting Bush's successor. Senator Walter Mondale was a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee that investigated the CIA. He has sound ideas on the part covert activity should play in the work of the agency.

The Minnesota Democrat wrote before he became Carter's running-mate that he hoped the next president speaks to the American people and the world as follows:

"It will be the policy of the United States to conduct its relations with other countries on a straightforward basis.... We reject a policy of covert intervention into the internal affairs of other nations.

"America will continue those intelligence activities essential to its security and that of its friends and allies.... Covert action will be reserved for extraordinary circumstances in which the security of this nation or its allies is in serious jeopardy.

"The era of covert day-to-day manipulation of media, people and events has ended. American intelligence activities will be restructured accordingly."

Carter needs to select as successor to Bush someone who shares exactly these beliefs.